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ABSTRACT

Faculty development practices vary greatly among the four geographical regions of the United States, according to the results of a national survey of school districts during the 1985-86 academic year. Of the 353 districts sent questionnaires (all identified by state departments of education as having outstanding staff development programs), 267 responded. The 63 questions that were asked covered four topics: (1) how needs assessment is conducted, (2) how the programs are administered, (3) how evaluation and followup are performed, and (4) what superintendents felt about the programs' impact and teacher participation. The survey results suggested that sound staff development practices were most firmly established in the South. This report enumerates a number of the specific survey findings. (PGD)

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SCHOOL STAFF DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES IN THE MIDWEST: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

A Paper Presented at the
Mid-Western Education Research Association
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The development and utilization of effective staff development programs has emerged as one of the most promising and adaptable means of improving teacher skills and student achievement. A 1984 study revealed that 25 states mandated staff development for local school districts with 10 states reviewing legislation pertaining to staff development. Most of the activity has taken place in the South with 10 states in 1984 mandating staff development for local school districts.[1] Realistically a mandate is one thing; the utilization of sound practices and implementation of effective programs is another. During the 1985-86 academic year a national study was conducted involving all 50 states. A 63 item survey questionnaire was developed, field tested and mailed to 353 school districts located throughout the United States and identified through state departments of education as having outstanding staff development programs.[2] Responses were received from 267 districts or 76 percent of the total sample.[3]

Perusal of the literature confirms that effective staff development programs are composed of a number of components. These include: a comprehensive needs assessment, staff input into planning, participation of affected personnel in conducting activities, delivery systems conducive with adult learning theories, support and reinforcement of teachers following staff development, and evaluation of programs and teacher developed competencies. For the purpose of discussion, questions and responses relating to staff development have been divided into the following categories: superintendent perceptions not reported in other categories, needs assessment, activities, administration, and evaluation

and follow-up.

Superintendent Perceptions

Superintendents were asked several questions pertaining to the effectiveness of staff development in increasing student achievement, teacher instructional skills, teacher participation and attitudes toward staff development activities. Nearly 83 percent of the superintendents representing the East, 75 percent in the Midwest, 84 percent in the South and 87 percent in the West stated that teachers in their districts usually viewed staff development as a positive step in improving student achievement (See Figure 1).

Improvement of teacher instructional skills is usually one of the major reasons for staff development. Half of the superintendents representing the East, 64 percent in the Midwest, 84 percent in the South and 73 percent in the West indicated that staff development had improved teacher instructional skills. Superintendents were also asked if staff development activities developed competencies ultimately designed to increase student achievement. Sixty-two percent of the respondents in the East, 71 percent in the Midwest, 93 percent in the South, and 95 percent in the West stated that staff development had created such competencies. Respondents were also asked if teachers viewed staff development as a burden. Twenty-one percent of the superintendents representing the East, 16 percent in the Midwest, 27 percent in the South, and 13 percent representing the West indicated that teachers in their districts viewed staff development as a burden.

Questions pertaining to teacher participation in staff development activities were also asked. Fifty percent of the superintendents from the East, 52 percent from the Midwest, 88 percent from the South, and

43 percent from the West indicated that staff development activities were required for all new staff. Nearly 55 percent of the superintendents from the East, 27 percent from the Midwest, 58 percent from the South, and 13 percent from the West indicated that participation in staff development activities was usually mandatory.

Needs Assessment

A comprehensive assessment of district and staff needs is a major component of effective staff development programs. Needs assessments measure the strengths and weaknesses of educational programs and form one criteria to determine the staff development activities needed to improve staff skills and subsequently student achievement. Sixty-two percent of the superintendents representing the East, 65 percent in the Midwest, 82 percent in the South, and 77 percent in the West reported that a needs assessment was conducted prior to initiating staff development activities. A second important aspect of quality staff development programs is staff involvement in the planning process. Nearly 79 percent representing the East, 83 percent from the Midwest, and 84 percent in the South reported that teachers were involved in the planning of staff development activities. Teacher involvement in staff development was highest in the Western United States with over 87 percent of the respondents reporting that teachers were usually involved in the planning of staff development activities.

Superintendents were also asked if staff development programs were designed to meet teacher needs. Over 34 percent of the respondents from the East, 53 percent from the Midwest, 71 percent from the South, and 58 percent from the West reported that staff development programs were designed to meet the needs of teachers. Respondents were also

asked if needs identified through teacher evaluations became staff development topics. Over 35 percent of the superintendents representing the East, 23 percent from the Midwest, 66 percent from the South, and 44 percent from the West reported staff development topics originated from deficiencies identified through teacher evaluations.

Associated with a needs assessment is the formulation of goals and objectives. Nearly 60 percent of the districts in the East, 64 percent of the districts in the Midwest, 80 percent in the South and 59 percent in the West reported the existence of a written staff development program with goals and desired outcomes.

Administration of Staff Development Programs

If staff development programs are to be successful, the psychological needs of the individuals affected must be addressed. Some of the specific needs include staff involvement in decision-making, input regarding topics and delivery systems, and individual recognition for implementation. Forty-five percent of the superintendents representing the East, 50 percent from the Midwest, 59 percent from the South, and 55 percent from the West indicated that teacher input existed in meeting such needs through planned activities.

Utilization of local personnel in conducting staff development activities has also been deemed important by experts in the area of staff development. Sixty-nine percent of the respondents from the East, 73 percent from the Midwest, 76 percent from the South, and 68 percent representing the West reported that teachers responded more positively to district or local employees than to outside consultants. Seventy-one percent of the districts from the East, 67 percent from the Midwest, 77 percent from the South, and 74 percent representing the West

indicated that local personnel were usually used in conducting staff development activities when they possessed the needed competencies.

Providing teachers with activities conducive with adult learning theory such as workshops is an important staff development concept. Superintendents from the four geographic regions were asked if staff development sessions for teachers involved hands-on experiences and/or workshops with activity oriented sessions. Half of the respondents from the East, 48 percent from the Midwest, 69 percent from the South, and 64 percent from the West indicated that staff development sessions usually consisted of workshops and activity oriented sessions.

Effective staff development also requires comprehensive support and supervision following staff development sessions. Teachers must be provided with suggestions, guidelines and materials following staff development. Sixty-three percent of the district superintendents in the East, 67 percent in the Midwest, 79 percent in the South, and 77 percent in the West indicated that teachers were provided guidelines and suggestions following sessions. Respondents were also asked if teachers working with concepts derived from staff development activities received administrative support. Over two-thirds of the respondents representing the East, 64 percent from the Midwest, 82 percent from the South and 63 percent from the West stated that teachers usually received administrative support following staff development sessions.

Superintendents representing the four geographical locations were also asked if incentives such as rewards and/or recognition were provided to teachers utilizing staff development concepts. Twenty-one percent of the superintendents in the East, 29 percent in the Midwest, 26 percent in the South and 43 percent in the West revealed that

teachers were provided incentives for utilizing staff development concepts. Yet most superintendents did not provide rewards or recognition for teacher involvement.

Superintendents were also asked if staff development activities were adequately financed. Sixty-four percent of the respondents from the East, 65 percent from the Midwest, 69 percent from the South and 64 percent from the West reported that staff development activities were adequately budgeted. These figures undoubtedly were high when compared to other districts, as the respondents were from schools recognized for their excellence in providing staff development.

Evaluation and Followup

Evaluation is a major component in all quality educational programs. In order to enhance program strengths and counter weaknesses, staff development activities must be closely monitored and subsequently modified to promote program effectiveness. Evaluation encompasses both program evaluation and the evaluation of staff utilization of concepts.

A series of questions were asked to determine if teachers were held accountable for the implementation of concepts following training activities. The first question asked was: are teachers supervised in the use of ideas and concepts following staff development sessions? Twenty-two percent of the respondents representing the East, 19 percent from the Midwest, 43 percent from the South, and 36 percent from the West reported that teachers were supervised in their use of ideas and concepts following staff development activities. A second question asked was: are teachers evaluated on the implementation of concepts? Seventeen percent of the districts representing the East, 4 percent

from the Midwest, 30 percent from the South, and 19 percent from the West stated that teachers were usually evaluated on their implementation of staff development activities. The third question asked was: are activities usually evaluated based upon changed teacher behavior? Twenty-nine percent of the superintendents representing the East, 18 percent from the Midwest, 30 percent from the South, and 33 percent from the West stated that staff development activities were evaluated based upon changed teacher behavior.

The superintendents were also asked a series of questions pertaining to modifications made in programs following activities. Thirty-three percent of the respondents from the East, 31 percent from the Midwest, 45 percent from the South and 20 percent from the West reported that follow-up sessions were usually scheduled to discuss implementation and utilization of concepts. One question was asked concerning the desired outcome of staff development. Is modification of teacher behavior following staff development essential? Surprisingly 21 percent of the respondents from the East, 31 percent from the Midwest, 52 percent from the South and 37 percent from the West related that modification of teacher behavior was an essential part of staff development.

Summary and Conclusions

Staff development practices vary greatly between the four geographical regions of the United States. Sound staff development practices seem to be most firmly established in the South where southern states led other geographical regions in 18 of 25 questions in this survey. Interestingly, however, a larger number of superintendents

in the South stated that teachers viewed staff development as a burden.

If teacher skill and student achievement is to improve, comprehensive staff development programs must be implemented. Effective programs are comprised of a number of components that must work in unison with one another if improvements are to be realized. Administrators must establish high expectations and insist that participants utilize information derived from staff development programs and presentations. One of the most surprising findings was that collectively less than one in three of the respondents indicated that modification of teacher behavior was essential. Staff development is one of the best methods of improving education; however, expectations and the tracking of activities vis-a-vis supervision will have to be focused upon if educational improvement is to become a reality.

NOTES

1. "The States Market Staff Development for Schools: A 1984 Study of the 50 States," Educational Horizons 63 (1985) 65-71.

2. The revised survey questionnaires were mailed to selected superintendents of school districts in each state. Responses were received from districts in all 50 states with many individuals returning additional material pertaining to district staff development programs.

3. The data were computer analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS-X) Program. Analyzed variables included among others location (state and region of the U.S.) and staff development components consistently emphasized in research findings that were utilized by individual districts.

FIGURE 1
PERCENTAGE SCORES OF SCHOOL STAFF DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES IN FOUR GEOGRAPHICAL REGIONS OF THE UNITED STATES

	SURVEY QUESTION	MIDWEST	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1.	Teachers are involved in planning staff development.	82.7	78.6	83.6	87.2
2.	Modifications made to staff development programs based upon feedback.	78.4	66.7	73.2	85.0
3.	Staff development competencies improve student achievement.	71.2	61.9	92.9	94.9
4.	Sessions are conducted by local personnel when qualified.	67.3	71.4	76.8	74.4
5.	Teachers are provided guidelines following sessions.	67.3	63.4	78.6	76.9
6.	Staff development has improved teacher instructional skills.	65.4	50.0	83.9	72.5
7.	A needs assessment is conducted prior to staff development.	65.4	61.9	82.1	76.9
8.	Teachers provided administrative support following staff development.	63.5	66.7	82.1	62.5
9.	Written programs and desired outcomes exist.	63.5	59.5	80.4	59.0
10.	Staff development sessions are held after regular school hours.	54.9	57.1	70.9	59.0
11.	Staff development is designed to meet individual teacher needs.	52.9	35.7	71.4	57.9
12.	Staff development is required for all new staff.	51.9	50.0	87.5	42.5
13.	Teachers have input in staff development.	50.0	45.2	58.9	55.0
14.	University courses are considered as staff development.	49.0	35.7	62.5	60.0
15.	Staff development sessions involve hands on experiences.	48.1	50.0	69.1	64.1
16.	There is a staff development resource center in the district.	43.1	23.8	40.8	36.1
17.	Follow-up sessions to discuss implementation-utilization of concepts.	31.4	33.3	44.6	20.0
18.	Modification of teacher behavior essential part of staff development.	30.6	21.4	51.8	36.8
19.	Incentives provided to teachers utilizing staff development concepts.	28.8	21.4	25.5	43.2
20.	Participation in staff development is mandatory.	26.9	54.8	58.2	13.2
21.	Staff development topics often originate from teacher evaluation.	23.1	35.7	66.1	43.6
22.	Teachers are supervised in the use of staff development concepts.	19.2	22.8	42.6	35.9
23.	Activities are evaluated based upon changed teacher behavior.	17.6	28.6	30.4	33.3
24.	Teachers are evaluated on implementation of staff development concepts.	3.8	16.7	30.4	18.9
25.	Staff development is emphasized more at the secondary level.	2.0	2.4	3.6	2.7

The sample was comprised of 190 school districts (East 42, South 56, Midwest 52, West 40) representing the four major geographical regions of the United States.